

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 211840

60

ORIGIN AF-18

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DRAFTED BY AF/C:WHSIEFKEN:LJM

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AF/L:MSPIEGEL

CUSTOMS:MR. DRIPA

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P 262100Z OCT 73

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SCUL

SUBJECT: ART OBJECT FROM LIKOM

REF: STATE 170809

1. NEW YORK TIMES CARRIED FRONT PAGE ARTICLE TITLED LOST SACRED AFRICAN ART TURNS UP IN GALLERY HERE END QUOTE BY FRED FERRETTI, WITH LENGTHY ARTICLE DESCRIBING THE AFO-A-KOM STATUE BELIEVED STOLEN FROM KOM PEOPLE IN 1966 OR 67. CAMEROON EMBASSY FIRST SECRETARY NKUO, WHO IS A KOM, PROVIDED MUCH OF THE HISTORY CONCERNING THE STATUE. THE ARTICLE THEN DESCRIBES HOW THE STATUE WAS PROBABLY STOLEN AND TAKEN OUT OF CAMEROON. THE STATUE IS NOW IN THE POSSESSION OF AARON FURMAN, A NEW YORK CITY ART DEALER WHO SAYS THAT HE PURCHASED THE STATUE OUTSIDE OF THE US AND IMPORTED IT LEGALLY. CAMEROONIAN EMBASSY OFFICIALS HAVE EMPHASIZED THEIR DESIRE TO REGAIN THE STATUE FOR RETURN TO KOM PEOPLE. A COPY OF THE ARTICLE IS BEING POUCHED.

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2. DEPARTMENT HAS BEEN IN CONTACT WITH THE CAMEROONIAN EMBASSY, DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND BUREAU OF CUSTOMS. CUSTOMS HAS PLACED A QUOTE CONSTRUCTIVE SEIZURE UNQUOTE ON THE ARTICLE TO PREVENT ITS DISPOSAL BY FURMAN. THIS ACTION MEANS THAT ALTHOUGH THE ARTICLE REMAINS IN FURMAN'S POSSESSION, HE CANNOT DISPOSE OF IT PENDING HIS PROVING TO THE SATISFACTION OF THE BUREAU OF CUSTOMS THAT HE IMPORTED IT LEGALLY. THIS ACTION GIVES THE USG AND CAMEROON TIME TO DETERMINE WHAT ACTION MAY BE TAKEN CONCERNING THE RESTORATION OF THE STATUE TO THE GURC OR KOM PEOPLE. A MEETING IS TO BE HELD MONDAY MORNING WITH CAMEROONIAN AMBASSADOR AND USG OFFICIALS TO DETAIL WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR GURC TO DO TO RECLAIM ARTICLE. THE AMBASSADOR IS OUT OF TOWN AND WILL RETURN SUNDAY. AT THE MOMENT IT APPEARS THAT GURC WILL HAVE TO OFFICIALLY PROVIDE ASSERTION OF BASIS OF CLAIM OF OWNERSHIP BY GOVERNMENT OR TRIBE UNDER CAMEROONIAN LAW AND ASSERT THAT THE ARTICLE WAS ILLEGALLY REMOVED FROM CAMEROON. WILL PROVIDE COMPLETE DETAILS AFTER MEETING MONDAY.

3. FOR HELP ALONG THIS LINE WOULD APPRECIATE PROMPT RESPONSE REFTEL. DECONTROL UPON RECEIPT. KISSINGER

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